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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6209  
INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE  
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RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 7575  
RUEHRL/AMEMBASSY BERLIN 1275  
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 6236  
RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW 3315  
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 1660  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 6272  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC  
RUEIDN/DNI WASHINGTON DC  
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 7884  
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SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/INS

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SUBJECT: SUBJECT: BHARAT BALLOT 09: INDIA GOES TO THE  
POLLS, PHASE 1

REF: BHARAT BALLOT 09 SERIES

11. Summary: (U) On April 16, Indian voters cast their ballots in 124 election districts across 17 states and territories in the first of five phases of parliamentary elections, thus marking the start of the biggest democratic exercise the world has ever seen. Polling in the first round was generally peaceful and smooth. The turnout appeared to vary from state to state but was in line with previous elections. Votes will be counted and results announced on May 16 after all five phases of polling have been completed and 714 million voters have had a chance to cast their ballot to elect a new lower house of parliament and a new government. End Summary.

12. (U) Voters in 17 states and territories went to the polls in the first of five phases of India's national parliamentary elections. The first phase comprised 124 of India's 543 seats. The total electorate in these constituencies is 158 million; 1,715 candidates from 162 political parties are contesting for these seats. Counting will take place and results announced on May 16 after the completion of all five phases of polling over the next month.

13. (U) The Election Commission has prohibited exit polls on grounds that they can be manipulated and could influence voter behavior in subsequent rounds. It is not possible, therefore, to get a quick read on any trends or patterns in how voters cast their ballots today. The Commission has not yet officially announced today's voter turnout but early reports suggest that turnout varied from very high in some areas (Northeast, Orissa) to tepid (some parts of Andhra Pradesh) but was generally in line with previous elections.

14. (U) The 124 parliamentary constituencies going to the polls in the first phase are located in the following states/territories):  
-- Assam (3 of 10 seats)  
-- all Northeast, other than Assam (7 seats)  
-- Chhattisgarh (all 11 seats)  
-- Uttar Pradesh (16 of 80 seats)  
-- Bihar (13 of 40 seats)

-- Jharkhand (6 of 10 seats)  
-- Orissa (10 of 21 seats; concurrent state assembly elections)  
-- Andhra Pradesh (22 of 42 seats; concurrent state assembly elections)  
-- Maharashtra (13 of 48 seats)  
-- Kerala (all 20 seats)  
-- Jammu and Kashmir (1 out of 6 seats)  
-- Andaman and Nicobar; Lakshadweep (both seats)

#### Peaceful Polls

15. (U) Considering that most of the constituencies going to the polls are located in some of the most violence prone parts of the country -- the Northeast, the Maoists/Naxalite affected states in central-eastern India, and Jammu and Kashmir -- the first round of elections appears to have been remarkably peaceful. There were a few scattered incidents of violence, mostly attributed to Maoist/Naxalite attempts to disrupt the process at some polling booths in the states of Jharkhand, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, and Orissa. According to media reports 17 people were killed in over a dozen attacks by extremists at polling booths or against government personnel involved in managing the elections. In the Indian context, this is a very low level of violence in an election exercise where passions, grievances and stakes can run high.

#### Big Names Contestants

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16. (U) Some of the prominent personalities contesting during phase 1 include: GOI Ministers Lalu Prasad Yadav (Railways), Ram Vilas Paswan (Indian Chemicals/Fertilizers and Steel), Renuka Choudhary (Women and Child Development), Vilas Muttemwar (Renewable Energy), Praful Patel (Aviation), E.Ahamed (External Affairs), S. Jaipal Reddy (Urban Development), D. Punandareswari (Human Resource Development); BJP heavyweight Murali Manohar Joshi; rising BJP star Yogi Adityanath; former BJP Minister Rudra Pratap Rudy; former UN Undersecretary Shashi Tharoor.

#### Uttar Pradesh

17. (U) Uttar Pradesh's 16 eastern constituencies, also known as Purvanchal, went to the polls in the first phase of India's parliamentary elections. (Note: Uttar Pradesh, a poor, largely rural state of 185 million, holds the largest number of Lok Sabha seats (eighty) and will be crucial to any coalition hoping to come to power in New Delhi. End Note.) There were no reports of violence during voting in the region, and voter turnout seemed to be on par with past Indian parliamentary elections (55-65 percent). Although no single party seems poised to sweep the region, India's two national parties -- the Congress Party and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) -- could possibly pick up seats in the area at the expense of regional parties, the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) and the Samajwadi Party (SP).

#### Kerala

18. (U) Voters cast their ballots in all 20 parliamentary seats of Kerala today. The ruling Communist Left Democratic Alliance which wiped out the Congress Party in 2004 is playing defense against a resurgent Congress Party, which may make significant gains in the state. The left parties are weighed down by infighting, scandal and voter disenchantment. The polling in the state on April 16 was peaceful. Heat and humidity is reported to have depressed turnout statewide to 56 percent, down from the usually high 65 plus percent that occurs in Kerala.

## Andhra Pradesh

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¶9. (U) In Andhra Pradesh (AP), polling for the concurrent 2009 parliamentary and state assembly elections took place today in 22 parliamentary and 154 state Assembly constituencies across 10 districts in Telangana and three districts in North Coastal Andhra. The remaining parliamentary and state assembly contests in 20 parliamentary election districts will take place on April 23. Polling was peaceful, in part because Andhra Pradesh instituted elaborate security arrangements to ensure that violence by Naxalite or other groups did not disrupt voting. More than 60,000 police and paramilitary forces were deployed to maintain law and order around 36,061 polling stations, of which 12,384 were designated as sensitive, hypersensitive, extremist affected, or troublesome.

¶10. (U) Early news reports noted that as many as 30 million people could turn out to exercise their franchise in the state. However, media contacts indicate that there was only a 13-15 percent turnout in the first 3 hours and electronic media reports only a 50 percent turnout by the end of the day. Spot reporting bears this out and highlights how turnout varied greatly from neighborhood to neighborhood. At the polling station in Secunderabad's affluent West Maredapally area, turnout was significantly higher than in previous years as whole families disembarked from Honda Civics to vote. Conversely, the streets of Hyderabad's predominantly Muslim

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Old City were empty except for police, as residents avoided polling stations fearing a repeat of the communal violence that erupted during the last election. At the Bharat Heavy Electricals Ltd. (BHEL) enclave on the northern edge of Hyderabad, locals said that many residents had taken advantage of the voting to depart on holiday over the long weekend. Local officials noted that turnout in rural Sangareddy district was higher than previous elections. They attributed this to effective "get-out-the-vote" television campaigns and the efforts of the Election Commission. However, the issues of rural development and irrigation were the primary reasons cited by most voters for turning out to vote.

¶11. (U) While overall it seems that voting was conducted in an orderly manner (wait times were less than 30 minutes), there were sporadic complaints and the State Election Officer announced that 17 voting stations in Mahbubnagar would be re-pollled. There were several reports of the failure of voting machines and some complaints of aspiring voters to appear on the lists. Turnout of the much hyped 'youth vote' may have been impacted by the timing of the polls to coincide with university examinations.

## Orissa

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¶12. (U) Voters in 10 of Orissa's 21 parliamentary districts went to the polls on April 16. The balance of the state will go to the polls in the second phase on April 23. Orissa is also concurrently holding elections to its state legislature, the five year term of which has run out. Most parliamentary constituencies in the state are seeing three-cornered contests between the Congress Party, the BJP and Naveen Patnaik's Biju Janata Dal, which dramatically broke away recently from the BJP after a 10-year alliance. One of the seats in contention includes Kandhamal, the site of violence against Christians during the past year. Reports are that turnout was high despite the heat and recent communal tension. The polling was peaceful except for reported Maoists raids on four polling stations where extremists set fire to voting machines and a vehicle in Malkangiri and Sundargarh districts.

¶13. (U) Polling for 13 out of Maharashtra's total 48 seats also occurred today. Ten of the Maharashtra seats are in the eastern region of Vidarbha. Polling was peaceful, notwithstanding one reported attempt by Maoists/Naxalites to disrupt the election. Prominent local candidates and caste politics will be factors in the elections in the Vidarbha region. Dalits, a significant proportion of voters in Vidarbha, are likely to split their votes among candidates from all the major contesting parties, including the Congress Party, BJP, Mayawati's Bahujan Samaj Party, and Maharashtra's Republican Party of India.

¶14. (U) In the Gadchiroli district of Vidarbha, police claim to have foiled an attempted Maoist attack on a village polling place. District Superintendent of Police Rajesh Pradhan told the press that police opened fire and chased the insurgents back into the jungle. There were no casualties but the attackers reportedly left behind weapons and explosives. Earlier this month Maoist extremists ambushed a police party in the densely forested district of Gadchiroli, killing 15. (Note: The tribal population is nearly 39 percent, more than double the state average of 17 percent. End Note.)

Naxalite Activity Chhattisgarh, Bihar, Jharkhand  
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¶15. (U) Polling for all 11 parliamentary seats of Chhattisgarh took place on April 16. The BJP, which returned to power under Chief Minister Raman Singh less than six months ago, hopes to put in a strong performance. Despite the attacks on a few polling places, the state elections were conducted safely, and turn-out was high (70.53 percent across the state, roughly 6.4 million voters). There were reports of violence at six polling sites in the Bastar district of southern Chhattisgarh shortly after the polls opened at 7 am. (Note: The southern Chhattisgarh constituency of Bastar comprises the two, large, mineral-rich districts of Bastar and Dantewada, which is the epicenter of the state's Naxalite insurgency. The constituency is largely tribal, rural, and extremely poor and underdeveloped. End Note.) Chhattisgarh Additional Director General of Police Girdhari Nayak told the press, "The (Maoist) rebels fired at six booths in Dantewada and Narayanpur districts but no one was injured." The voters, reportedly 20 tribals, panicked and ran away. Hindustan Times reporter Ejaz Kaiser told Congenoff he has unconfirmed reports of four polling staff killed in Chhattisgarh when their vehicle hit a land mine on the way to the polls in the early morning. Kaiser is also working to confirm reports of two security police injured and the looting of one electronic voting machine.

¶16. (U) In Jharkhand, one of the least developed and most Naxalite-affected states of India, there were reports of seven Border Security Force personnel killed in a single attack when extremists detonated a land mine over a bus that was transporting paramilitary soldiers to an election center. There were two gun battles between security forces and Maoists in Khuti and Palamau districts, disrupting voting in both places, police spokesman K.N. Pradhan said.

¶17. (U) In Bihar, a crucial electoral state where the Congress Party and its erstwhile allies Lalu Prasad Yadav and Ram Vilas Paswan are contesting, polling took place for 13 of the states 40 seats. BJP ally Nitish Kumar is reported to be well positioned to make major gains in the state. There were reports that Lalu Prasad Yadav is facing a tough battle for his own seat, thus forcing him to devote attention to his own constituency and limiting his ability to canvas for his party in other parts of the state. According to a media report, Maoists/Naxalites were responsible for killing one policeman and a Home Guard when they opened fire at a polling station

in Bankebazaar in Gaya district, about 130 km from the state capital Patna. They also looted an electronic voting machine and four rifles.

Assam, Northeast and Jammu and Kashmir

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¶18. (U) Polling was peaceful and smooth. Turnout was generally high. There were not reported incident of violence in these states which have had a history of terrorist related violence, with many groups holding deep grievances against the Indian state.

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